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SUBJECT: BURUNDI'S MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTIES DESPERATE FOR DIALOGUE WITH NKURUNZIZA

**¶1.** (SBU) Summary: The leaders of Burundi's major opposition parties, Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), Leonice Ngendakumana, and Union for National Progress (UPRONA), Aloys Rubuka, both insisted that dialogue between Burundi President Pierre Nkurunziza's government and the two largest opposition parties as well as pressure from the international community, with possible facilitation by a third party, is imminently critical to maintaining Burundi's peace and progress.

FRODEBU's Ngendakumana spoke frankly and forcefully about the government of Burundi's (GOB) stymied negotiations with the PALIPEHUTU-FNL, FRODEBU's participation in the government, and the need for Burundi President Pierre Nkurunziza to initiate a dialogue among the major political entities. Ngendakumana refuted the rumors of a direct link of his party to the PALIPEHUTU-FNL, and justified FRODEBU's recent departure from the government as their only constitutional option as an opposition party. In contrasting styles, UPRONA's Rubuka quietly expressed his party's desire for Nkurunziza and the ruling National Council for the Defense of Democracy - Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party to demonstrate goodwill by engaging UPRONA and allowing them to be active contributors to Burundi's political future. He suggested that the ruling party overcome their pride and take the responsibility for creating a framework for dialogue. Claiming UPRONA to have never taken action to sabotage the government's policies, he shared the party's disappointment at being ignored. End Summary.

**¶2.** (SBU) Leonice Ngendakumana, leader of Burundi's second largest political party, met with Ambassador Moller early in the afternoon of August 2. In assessing the current atmosphere in Burundi, Ngendakumana characterized the nation's social, economic, and political climates as reasons to worry for the future. He stated that although the country is enjoying relative peace and the support of the international community, the struggle to adopt dialogue as a tool for progress in the political arena is still illusory. As a party, Ngendakumana stated that FRODEBU is asking the government to act in three areas: to govern responsibly by abiding by the constitution; continue the negotiations for peace with the PALIPEHUTU-FNL; and to fight corruption within their ranks.

**¶3.** (SBU) Ngendakumana accused the ruling CNDD-FDD party of having no intention of negotiating with the PALIPEHUTU-FNL. As proof, he outlined President Nkurunziza's initial weak attempts to attract the rebel group to the negotiating table and Nkurunziza ultimately becoming complacent as he allowed his police forces to harass, mistreat, and prosecute FRODEBU members and others as being part of the PALIPEHUTU-FNL, an assumption FRODEBU has denied in the past

and continues to deny today. Having been forced to participate in the ceasefire talks in Dar es Salaam in September 2006, according to Ngendakumana, the GOB signed a 'false agreement'; an agreement that cannot be genuine if it does not adequately define the role of the PALIPEHUTU-FNL in the government or the military. When asked to speculate the reasons for Nkurunziza's inability to move the peace process forward, Ngendakumana suggested that the military wing of the CNDD-FDD is sympathetic to the PALIPEHUTU-FNL and pressuring the Burundi president not to continue the negotiations. When pressed to elaborate, the FRODEBU party leader described those influencing the president as being inexperienced, having their own logic, and wary of FRODEBU's numbers (those thought to be friendly to the PALIPEHUTU-FNL) in influential positions as reasons behind their behavior.

¶4. (SBU) Ngendakumana spoke at length concerning FRODEBU's participation in Nkurunziza's government. Foremost, he accused the Nkurunziza of ignoring Burundi's constitution by excluding FRODEBU and other minority parties from key positions in his government and disregarding other voices in formulating policy. Ngendakumana explained that after the 2005 elections, FRODEBU and UPRONA, as the second and third largest political forces, expected to be invited to discussions with the PALIPEHUTU-FNL aimed at sustaining the peace. They were not. More recently, the FRODEBU leader stated that the GOB sacked a number of FRODEBU members, including those who had been legitimately elected to serve. When FRODEBU asked the ruling party the reasons for these dismissals, Ngendakumana alleged that the CNDD-FDD simply said that FRODEBU does 'not accept that we (CNDD-FDD) are the winners'.

¶5. (SBU) In clarifying FRODEBU's recent decision not to actively participate in Nkurunziza's government, Ngendakumana

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explained that his party had decided to be a member of the opposition and, according to Burundi's constitution, party members cannot be in opposition and participate in the government at the same time. Ambassador Moller pressed Ngendakumana for elaboration to this rule, supporting her question by explaining that democracies require minority voices and self-exclusion invites blame for any future problems that may arise in the affairs of state. Ngendakumana recognized the need to be a part of the democratic process but specifically pointed to provisions within the constitution limiting FRODEBU's role as an opposition party. Ngendakumana conceded that the political situation has only worsened since FRODEBU's exodus from the government. Although FRODEBU has reluctantly returned to the business of government, primarily due to a threat from the World Bank to suspend disbursement of 40 million USD of developmental funds, Ngendakumana feared that FRODEBU's participation legitimizes the corruption of Nkurunziza's administration, acts for which he believes Nkurunziza needs to be prosecuted and punished.

¶6. (SBU) Ngendakumana claimed a recent rise in executive corruption as being the result of the blockage of progress at all levels of government. He opined that the outlook for improvement is not good primarily because the ruling CNDD-FDD party no longer holds a majority in Parliament and is thus unable to pass laws. Ngendakumana alleged that, in response, Nkurunziza is appointing people, whom Ngendakumana characterized as corrupt, into new positions and Ngendakumana also insinuated that the ruling government may be tempted to use force in loosening the legislative logjam. Alternatively, in Ngendakumana's opinion, the government has three options for skirting the current political stalemate: Nkurunziza can call a state of emergency; Nkurunziza can dissolve the National Assembly (which may be prohibited by law); or, the government can try to change the constitution (which would be difficult without a majority voice). Moreover, Ngendakumana pondered why the Burundi president has never spoken directly to the public concerning the

allegations of corruption and the political impasse.

¶7. (SBU) In a later meeting with Ambassador Moller, UPRONA party leader, Aloys Rubuka, characterized the current political malaise as predictable. He claimed that arrogance and pride have prevented President Nkurunziza and the ruling CNDD-FDD party from working in good faith and effectively with the opposition parties. Rubuka alleged that there is a great deal of scandal within the political, economic and human rights arenas, and mused as to whether the scandals are deliberately organized by the government. In Rubuka's words, unlike FRODEBU and despite the political deadlock at all levels, UPRONA has decided to continue to participate in the government and is merely asking for a gesture of goodwill from Nkurunziza and his CNDD-FDD ruling party. In conjunction with their participation, the UPRONA party asked the First Vice President and UPRONA member, Dr. Martin Nduwimana, not to sign any governmental proposals without consulting the party. Rubuka reasoned that the UPRONA party is not ready to accompany a regime that does not respect the constitution and warned Nduwimana that non-compliance with their demand would lead to internal party strife.

¶8. (SBU) Rubuka lamented that the political situation was heading 'nowhere'. The party leader accused the government of corruption by offering jobs only to political allies, threatening the loss of jobs to others who are less compliant, and using the threat of violence to prevent UPRONA from attending party meetings. In Rubuka's view, these are efforts to divide allegiances within the other political factions. He complained that Nkurunziza is spending more time out of the office rather than working in good faith to resolve the impending political crisis. As a result, feared Rubuka, the Burundi leader is fomenting a bad impression of the minority parties with the public. Furthermore, he added, the continuing tensions between the parties are weakening the parties, Burundi is wasting valuable time and energy, and the confidence of the international community could diminish.

¶9. (SBU) Party head Rubuka emphasized that the UPRONA party is more than ready for dialogue between the principal politucal players. He noted that UPRONA has never taken any action to sabotage the government's policies and has always made known to Nkurunziza UPRONA's availability and willingness to contribute to the government's efforts at improving the political and economic environment. Rubuka nonetheless expressed disappointed that their offer is

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essentially being ignored and he questioned why Nkurunziza has chosen the path of moving froward without UPRONA. Rubuka asserted that the major responsibility for developing a framework for dialogue lies with the Nkurunziza and his ruling party. He believed that the CNDD-FDD party, after coming to power following a divisive civil war, should be a party of modesty and refuse to let pride prevent it from reaching concessions with minority voices.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: Although their styles of delivery and the desires of their respective parties may be different, Ngendakumana and Rubuka expressed a common goal: to begin a dialogue with Nkurunziza's government to prevent a total collapse in the political and economic structures of Burundi. The government's apparent reluctance, thus far, to engage in a meaningful, constructive dialogue with opposition leaders, particularly these two influential minority parties, has raised widespread concerns for the future of the democratic process in Burundi and the welfare of its people. The perception that the President has sought to distance himself from the debate has exacerbated these concerns. At the very least, Nkurunziza should get ahead of the issues FRODEBU and UPRONA raise and publicly communicate to the Burundi people that he is working honestly and in good faith to resolve the political differences between his government and the opposition parties as well as the PALIPEHUTU-FNL. With this end in mind, meetings between the embassy and key opposition

members are continuing in an effort to grasp the various perceptions of the political environment. At the conclusion of these informational sessions, the embassy intends to find an opportunity to facilitate discussion between these disparate political factions in reaching common ground for moving Burundi's political process forward. End Comment.

MOLLER